

NEWS RELEASE

*OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS*

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For Immediate Release

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Ronald J. Tenpas, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Illinois, announced today that on October 28, 2005, **BARBARA L. LARRUBIA**, age 44, of 106 Sherryl Court, O'Fallon, Illinois, was sentenced to serve a 37 month term of imprisonment following her conviction for engaging in mail fraud schemes to defraud the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Social Security Administration (SSA) and for making false statements to the SSA. She was also ordered to pay restitution in the amount of \$244,455. Following pronouncement of the sentence, **LARRUBIA** was immediately taken into custody.

LARRUBIA pleaded guilty to the charges, which concerned her collection of disability benefits from the VA and the SSA, on January 6, 2005.

According to the Factual Stipulation filed with the Court on January 6, 2005, in 1994, **LARRUBIA** received a medical discharge from the Air Force based upon a diagnosis of Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy. In April, 1994, **LARRUBIA** applied for VA benefits, stating that she injured her right knee while in the Air Force, and that the condition was worsened by surgical attempts which caused nerve damage. On November 1, 1994, the VA found that **LARRUBIA** had a service connected injury, assessed her rating at 40%, and began paying her benefits.

Beginning in October, 1996, **LARRUBIA** began to falsely represent to the VA that she was no longer able to walk and was confined to a wheelchair, and she asked for an increase in her disability payments. On March 17, 1997, as a result of her false representations, the VA rated **LARRUBIA** as having a 100% disability and increased her benefit payments.

In May, 1997, **LARRUBIA** filed an application for SSA benefits which also falsely represented that she was confined to a wheelchair, that she was unable to drive, and that she was unable to wear shoes and socks. The SSA found **LARRUBIA** to be disabled and began paying her benefits.

On February 9, 2001, the Drug Enforcement Administration searched **LARRUBIA's** home while investigating her for illegally obtaining prescription drugs. When the investigative team learned of **LARRUBIA's** 100% VA disability rating, they contacted the VA and reported **LARRUBIA's** ability to ambulate. On November 28, 2001, the VA re-evaluated **LARRUBIA** at the 20% disability level, and she appealed the decision.

On February 1, 2002, in requesting auxiliary benefits for her newborn daughter, **LARRUBIA** falsely told the SSA that she had never been convicted of a felony, when, in fact, on or about April 24, 1998, **LARRUBIA** had been convicted of Fraudulently Attempting to Obtain a Controlled Substance.

On September 4, 2003, **LARRUBIA** falsely told an SSA representative that she was unable to drive, that she had not driven for three to four years, that she could not wear shoes, that she could not take steps without the use of crutches, that she could only take five steps with crutches, that she was otherwise dependent upon a wheelchair, and that she needed help with shopping and never went shopping alone. Agents conducting surveillance had observed **LARRUBIA** driving from her home to the SSA. On the way, **LARRUBIA** stopped at two gas stations, entering both on foot and without using any assistance devices. Agents then observed **LARRUBIA** arrive at the SSA parking lot. She took off her shoes, got into a wheelchair, and propelled herself into the SSA offices. After telling the SSA she could not walk, drive, or shop alone, **LARRUBIA** then went to the grocery store where she ambulated and shopped without difficulty.

A few days later, during a VA examination on September 17, 2003, **LARRUBIA** falsely told a neurologist that she could not stand, walk or drive.

The charges were a result of an investigation by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Inspector General and the Social Security Administration, Office of Inspector General.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Suzanne M. Garrison.

The Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of the Inspector General, Fraud Hotline provides an avenue for reporting fraud, waste, and abuse within VA programs and operations:

MAIL: DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
INSPECTOR GENERAL HOTLINE (53E)
P.O. BOX 50410
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20091-0410

FAX: (202) 565-7936
CALL: 1-800-488-8244
E-MAIL: vaoighotline@va.gov
WEBSITE: <http://www.va.gov/oig/hotline>

—————The Social Security Administration, Office of the Inspector General, Fraud Hotline provides an avenue for reporting fraud, waste, and abuse within SSA's programs and operations:

MAIL: SSA FRAUD HOTLINE
P.O. BOX 17768
BALTIMORE, MD 21235

FAX: (410) 597-0118
CALL: 1-800-269-0271
WEBSITE: <http://www.ssa.gov/oig/guideline.htm>